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MESOPOTAMIA

"I wish we had never gone there."
MR. BONAR LAW

The "Daily Mail" Inquiry at Baghdad

By

SIR PERCIVAL PHILLIPS, K.B.E.

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MESOPOTAMIA

The "Daily Mail" Inquiry at Baghdad

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SIR PERCIVAL PHILLIPS, K.B.E.

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PREFACE

IN the summer of 1922, Sir Percival Phillips was commissioned by "The Daily Mail" to proceed to Mesopotamia, as its Special Correspondent, and investigate on the spot the facts as to our occupation of that country. The present volume contains the series of reports which he sent home after the fullest inquiry in Baghdad, as they were published in "The Daily Mail."

Sir Percival Phillips needs no introduction to the British public. His work in France as a Special Correspondent during the war is well-known to all, and won him the well-deserved honour of a K.B.E. His great experience, strict accuracy and soundness of judgment pre-eminently qualified him for the difficult task of ascertaining the real situation in Mesopotamia, which had been veiled from the British people by the Coalition.

Mr. Bonar Law expressed the feeling of the whole country, when he said on Novenber 7, 1922, of Mesopotamia: "I wish we had never gone there." From the Armistice to the opening of last year the cost to the British taxpayer of Mesopotamia is estimated to have been not less than £100,000,000, and perhaps very much more. Sir Percival Phillips shows that in the present financial year no less than £7,600,000 is being exacted from the British taxpayer for the maintenance of a weak and unpopular native State in Mesopotamia; and that until the British definitely withdraw, further millions will have to be sunk annually.

There are two overwhelmingly strong objections to our continuance in Mesopotamia. The first is financial. We simply cannot afford the outlay there. We have not the money required for Iraq, as the official world has renamed Mesopotamia. It is a matter of life and death to British trade and British solvency to reduce the inordinate Government expenditure; and every item which is not indispensable to our security and existence must go.

The second is the military objection. It has been strongly put by the late Sir Henry Wilson and the Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff, who have always been hostile to this Mesopotamian adventure. We have not the troops or the aircraft to spare for collecting (by bombing) the Mesopotamian taxes, and coercing the wild tribes of Kurdistan. Nor can we overlook the risk of serious future wars which must be faced so long as we are in the north of Mesopotamia, remote from our bases, in difficult mountain country, and in contact with turbulent tribes which are constantly being instigated by the Bolsheviks to attack us.

There is a third objection to our continuance in Mesopotamia that is mainly sentimental. We are charged in the United States with being in Mesopotamia to "monopolise the oil," and with obtaining great national profit from our occupation. It is a ridiculous charge, but by withdrawing we shall answer it effectively and at the same time serve British interests.

The policy which Sir Percival Phillips recommends, after the fullest study on the spot, is withdrawal from all Mesopotamia except the small area round Basra, which could be cheaply held, and which would safeguard the single important, developed British oilfield—that acquired well before the war in South-Western Persia. This is a policy which has everything

to recommend it. The British nation with a debt of £8,000,000,000 cannot police the whole Near East or subvention all the indigent Arab States there.

A few words may be said as to the geography of Mesopotamia. That country consists of the three former Turkish provinces of Mosul (Southern Kurdistan), Baghdad and Basra. The area of the three is 150,000 square miles, and the population by the 1920 census 2,849,000, of whom 1,490,000 are Shiahs, a Moslem sect which refuses to obey any form of civil government. The greater part of the territory is sandy desert, much of it salted up.

By the treaty of Sevres and the decision of the Allied Supreme Council, Great Britain received a mandate for Mesopotamia, the effect of the mandate being that Great Britain had to find all the money required and renounce all possibility of profit. The British people were never consulted as to the acceptance of this mandate. In August, 1921, Feisal, son of the King of the Hedjaz, was elected King of Iraq, and was enthroned by the British. By a treaty signed October 10th, 1922, but not yet approved by Parliament, the late Coalition government guaranteed Feisal British financial and military assistance for a term of 20 years.

H. W. Wilson.

THE

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AND THE

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MILLSTONE ROUND THE TAXPAYER'S NECK

Mesopotamia is a millstone hung round the neck of the British taxpayer, and until it is cast off millions of pounds must be sunk yearly in trying to support a feeble and inefficient Arab Government.

We have created a native State there (called officially Iraq) and provided it with a cumbrous and costly organisation in which British military and civil elements are intermingled and intended to serve as a prop to the new Government until it can stand alone.

A dispassionate survey of present conditions shows that the results so far obtained do not justify the time and money lavished upon this enterprise. We are spending this year, according to figures secured from British official sources in Baghdad, £7,600,000. Of this amount nearly £200,000 is for the maintenance of the British civil administration in Mesopotamia and the remainder for the Military and Air Forces there. No less than £3,500,000 is being spent in the country for the upkeep of troops and the construction of new and costly bases. Yet our aim is ostensibly only to stabilise Iraq (Mesopotamia) as an independent Power. We are merely the advisers and not the dominant authority in Mesopotamia. The outlook is far from encouraging. There is an artificial kingdom ruled by an unpopular King, Feisal, and a doubtful Ministry, without the confidence of the people and dependent on a native population which is either suspicious or apathetic.

The King does not really trust us or his Ministers. The people trust neither King nor Ministers. The outstanding result of two years of so-called self-government is an empty treasury and a deficit. The crying need at the moment is an annual loan of at least £1,000,000—of course, from Great Britain. The national sentiment which the members of our expensive political mission have been trying to awaken in a country where that emotion has never before been experienced is manifesting itself chiefly in a scramble for jobs.

This, in brief, is the first chapter of the history of Mesopotamian independence. The British, who have, so far, acted as the pillars of

this unstable structure, realise the insecurity of its foundations. Their efforts to infuse a vigorous love of country into the detached tribes which form the population of Mesopotamia have not succeeded. A feeling of pessimism, which in some cases is tinged with despair, pervades the little community of British advisers.

Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner, has worked hard to get the machinery of internal government running smoothly. He has had a difficult and thankless task. He has met with obstruction from the King as well as from the people. The intrigues of factions in Baghdad and the open hostility of the provinces have combined to clog the wheels of administration.

A better feeling has prevailed since the signing of the treaty of alliance with Great Britain (on October 10th last, by which Great Britain promised Mesopotamia financial aid and military support), and since the energetic suppression of the anti-British agitation, which culminated in a public insult to Sir Percy Cox at the palace. The extreme pro-Arabs among the British officials, however, are too much inclined to regard this era of peace as a sign that political stability and financial prosperity have begun.

All the blame for the arrested development of the kingdom is placed upon the propagandists at the head of the anti-Mandate movement. To this agitation has been ascribed the stagnation of the revenue, the non-co-operation of the tribes, and even their resentment against the enthronement of an imported ruler.

Yet the new treaty will not work miracles. The failure of the Iraq (Mesopotamia) Government is due to far deeper causes; and it becomes a question how much longer we shall be justified in continuing to be its sponsor at a cost of nearly £8,000,000 a year. More than half the population of Mesopotamia are fanatical Shiahs (a Moslem sect), who are opposed to all forms of civil power. Even the most ardent pro-Arabs admit that they must be "dealt with sternly"; and that is apparently what the British military forces are in Mesopotamia for.

The self-dependent tribes in the desert have as little love for the King at Baghdad as for taxation in their homes and for military service. They pay taxes only reluctantly, when they pay them at all. The financial crisis this year has been largely due to the Government's inability to collect the revenue from the land and from other sources. Bombing aeroplanes have been used repeatedly as tax-gatherers in backward districts.

The Arab Ministers admit that they must have an efficient army

of their own to extract the national revenue from the pockets of the people. Without conscription this is impossible; with conscription success is doubtful. King Feisal's army at present consists of 400 officers and fewer than 4,000 men—the latter for the most part the dregs of Iraq's population. Notwithstanding that this army this year is costing £600,000, it is wholly incapable of keeping order—much less of helping the Treasury.

Meanwhile we British are seemingly settling down for a long stay in Mesopotamia. All possibility of clearing out appears to be resolutely ignored by the official mind. Both civil and military organisations are busily building up permanent establishments on a scale which would be unjustifiable even in a new British protectorate. In fact, there are enough officials in Mesopotamia to equip two or three well-governed dependencies of the Empire.

The High Commissioner, who is a kind of head tutor to the struggling young kingdom, is established in a new residency which has cost the British taxpayer up to date nearly £160,000, He is surrounded by a Cabinet of Civil Service experts to deal with civil and legal questions, external and internal affairs, Oriental matters, and other phases of administrative routine. These secretaries have other secretaries to assist them.

The cost of this establishment this year is £80,000, of which half is borne by the Iraq Government. There is also an Arab Council of Ministers with a dual organisation of British advisers behind it, which is wholly separate from the British secretariat across the river. These secretaries to Arab Ministers have in their turn two or three assistants.

For each divisional governor in Mesopotamia there is a British adviser. The Arab army has British advisers, and so have the police and all the departments and sub-departments of the Government. The country is full of advisers. Never was advice so costly or so unprofitable, for the sound opinions proffered by the British experts, all of whom take their duties very seriously, cannot be enforced in any way.

This immature State is jealous of its independence; it listens but does not necessarily follow the course indicated. The military expenditure proceeds merrily. The Air Force is spending at least £438,000 this year on a new base at Hinaidi, five miles from Baghdad, which will be the most elaborate military cantonment in the Middle East. Estimates of expenditure on "improvements and additions" at Hinaidi to be undertaken next year are already being considered,

so they are looking far into the future of an unbroken British occupation of Mesopotamia.

A total of £1,350,000 is allotted for new works this year. New depots are being built at Basra and Mosul. Yet the orgy of unauthorised extravagance which made the administration of Mesopotamia so notorious during and after the war has been largely checked. Expenditure is now watched with a nervous eye there because of the outcry at home. None the less, public funds are still being poured into the desert in an alarmingly generous manner.

Unless we intend to take over the country and are prepared to spend millions there for years to come, the present outlay is simply thrown away.

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CHAPTER TWO

TAX-COLLECTING BY BOMB

Tax-collecting by bomb has become almost a matter of routine for the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia.

It would surprise the British taxpayer to know the extent to which bombing has prevailed in the country districts of the new State of Iraq during the past year in order to bolster up King Feisal's authority. The conception of a united people cheerfully contributing to the national treasury is far wide of the mark. Taxation is the last thing the Arabs, as a whole, will submit to. Consequently British aeroplanes have been utilised to extract overdue revenue, and in general to impress the Mesopotamians with their responsibility as an independent nation.

Of course, innocent people have been killed; that cannot be helped. The subjugation of an unruly village or district involves the punishment of old women as well as recalcitrant head men. Our tax-collectors of the air drop their " eggs " as accurately as possible, but they cannot single out individuals.

I am told that this local bombing has been going on constantly for months past. Recently the Air Force has been engaged in more extensive operations on the fringe of Southern Kurdistan, where the tribes have responded to Turkish propaganda and shown hostility to British troops. Apart from this border warfare, however, there has been intensive bombing aimed solely at the enforcement of revenue laws.

The procedure is as follows: A local British adviser writes in to Baghdad to say that So-and-So will not pay his taxes, or that the water supply (a vital thing in this arid country) has been diverted by a certain landowner from his neighbour. The adviser asks that a message be dropped on the erring party, giving him a " first notice " to pay up arrears, or otherwise obey the law by a certain date.

A pilot flies over the designated area and leaves the warning. Nothing happens. The Arab knows when the raid will take place,

and makes his arrangements in a leisurely fashion. Thirty-pound bombs fall on or about his possessions in lieu of a "red notice," and the air is full of dust and wreckage.

The Arab sits through it stoically—some distance away. He has

MESOPOTAMIA AND SOUTHERN KURDISTAN.
The slightly shaded area near Basra shows the portion of Basra Province which Sir Percival Phillips proposes that Great Britain should retain, to safeguard the oil fields in Western Persia.

become used to bombing, and the throb of the engine overhead does not create the panic it did two years ago. He has provided himself with a funk-hole perhaps a mile distant. There he removes his valuables and those of his family who are worthy of being conserved. Cynical gossips in the Baghdad bazaars say that superfluous mothers-in-law are purposely left behind.

When the mud houses have ceased collapsing, and the dust has subsided, the non-taxpayer comes back to count the dead donkeys and ducks, and to arrange for the interment of his defunct relatives. It would be incorrect to say the visitation never has any effect. Sometimes it wrings money from him. The strain on family ties is obviously severe at times. Thus one sheikh, after a thorough bombing, wrote to the British adviser (enclosing something on account), saying :

" You have killed one wife and spoiled another, and I do not desire this sort of thing to go on."

The reluctance to pay taxes is hereditary. It was undoubtedly intensified by the anti-British feeling which swept through Iraq during the agitation against the mandate. Optimists profess to believe that taxes will flow in now that this grievance has been removed. Others, not unacquainted with the military phase of government, are as convinced that aeroplanes must continue to prod the provinces with explosives. I have been asked if the Home Government intends the Air Force to take over the duties of a bailiff on behalf of King Feisal.

Until now government by bomb as I have described it has been the only really effective form of authority in many parts of Iraq. It is not universal ; in some districts—Amarah (between Basra and Baghdad), for example—taxes are now paid fairly promptly ; yet it has been necessary to such an extent that people at home are entitled to wonder if the Air Force could not be better employed.

Recent operations in Kurdistan proved the efficacy of aeroplanes in another way. Turkish bands pressed down from the hills against Sikh outposts, and we had to evacuate Sulaimaniyeh (in the south of Southern Kurdistan) and Rania (also in Southern Kurdistan) hurriedly. The evacuation of Sulaimaniyeh was decided upon late one evening. Between dawn and noon next day a succession of aeroplanes flew into the town and took away some sixty persons and the detachment of Arab levies. A man and his wife and a baby were carried in one aeroplane, " packed like birds in a nest."

By means of aeroplanes we have advanced again into territory which was formerly hostile. Many villages along the south bank of the Zob-el-Astal River (in Southern Kurdistan) have been bombed, and others burnt by Arab levies. The town of Koy Sanjak (in Southern Kurdistan) would not turn the Turkish irregulars out, and was treated to a week's intensive bombing by way of persuasion. The Turks moved on to Rania, and Rania was bombed as intensively.

It became apparent to the tribes in that region that where Turks were there were also bombs. Sir Percy Cox caused a message to be dropped throughout the region stating that the tribes will not be punished for past misdeeds if the Turks are turned out.

While British aeroplanes are thus waging a little frontier war on behalf of Iraq, the Arab ministers in Baghdad discuss gravely whether Southern Kurdistan is to be incorporated in the new kingdom by force—the force apparently being British—or is to be allowed to decide its own destiny; also such problems as whether the tribes should be compelled to adopt Arabic as their official language.

State visits by air are becoming a familiar feature of the new administration. Recently Sir Percy Cox went by aeroplane to call on an influential sheikh north of Ramadi (90 miles west of Baghdad). He was preceded by a guard of honour of infantry and followed by his staff, all in aeroplanes, with the Union Jack flying from the struts. By the time Sir Percy touched earth the guard of honour had landed and was in position, and a bugle sounded the salute as the sheikh and followers went forward to greet him.

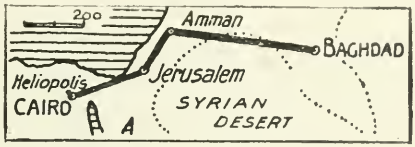
The Air Force is confident that it has the air power to enforce any policy the home Government imposes in Iraq, but there seems to be great uncertainty as to what the policy is at the present time. Rumours of complete evacuation of the country as far south as the Basra area have sent a shiver of dismay through the official area, but they have not diminished the building activity at Hinaidi (near Baghdad) and elsewhere.

Fifteen main aerodromes or landing-grounds have been established in Iraq, but two in the Sulaimaniyeh area (Southern Kurdistan) are now described as "wash-outs." It is probable, however, that this territory will be re-occupied in the near future and the bases re-opened.

The air-mail route between Cairo and Baghdad is partially maintained by the Air Force in Mesopotamia. West of Baghdad, the desert for a distance of 250 miles—half-way to Amman, in Trans-Jordania—is under the Baghdad headquarters, and in this area it makes all repairs to damaged machines and keeps unobstructed the thin furrow ploughed by a Ford tractor as a guide to mail pilots.

A fortnightly service is maintained between Baghdad and Cairo, the machines being sent in pairs in each direction. Six hours' flying covers the desert journey from Baghdad to Amman, where the aeroplanes usually halt overnight. The final lap from Amman

to Heliopolis aerodrome, near Cairo, is accomplished in about three hours, the route being over Jerusalem. The entire journey has frequently been done in one day. One staff officer told me that he has breakfasted in Baghdad and had tea in Cairo.



Baghdad-Cairo Air Route

The mails usually go through without mishap. Occasionally, however, an aeroplane is forced to descend in the desert, as happened this week, when the outward-bound mail from Cairo was marooned many miles from civilisation, and a first-aid machine sent with material and mechanics also landed ignominiously well away from its destination.

When an aeroplane is reported "down" in the Baghdad zone of the Syrian desert, a "breakdown gang" flies out from Hinaidi, perhaps with a spare engine, and the necessary repairs are effected. It is not a job eagerly sought after. The amount of water carried is necessarily limited, and a gallon a day is the maximum per man for drinking and washing.

The desert mail service is, in a sense, a "side issue" with the Air Force. Its main duty at present is to hold the restless tribes in check and to do work which should be performed by King Feisal's Government. There is not much likelihood of the latter authority taking it over unless Iraq has conscription. The Arabs do not intend to rush into military service of their own accord.

They are content to let Great Britain police the so-called frontiers and to use whatever force may be necessary to collect the country's revenue. That accomplished, they expect to spend the money as they please. Are they not an independent State?

CHAPTER THREE

THE BILL FOR MESOPOTAMIA.

If the British taxpayer wants to cut down national expenditure he might first seriously consider our position in Mesopotamia. The political education of Iraq—the new kingdom we have set up in that graveyard of vanished empires—is an undertaking which promises but meagre success in proportion to the amount of money already lavished on it.

The experiment will cost the British Exchequer this year at the very least nearly £8,000,000; perhaps more. Iraq's contribution is a deficit of about £670,000 on two years' independence, and a request for a loan of £1,000,000 a year in order to carry on.

The estimate of this year's expenditure by Great Britain which I have received from the financial secretary to the High Commissioner analyses our Iraq budget as follows:

Cost of High Commissioner and staff .. .. .. (The total cost is £80,000, and Iraq is supposed to pay half.)	**£40,000**
Repairs and maintenance of Residency and new outbuildings .. .. (Of this amount £5,000 will be spent.)	**£23,000**
Capital expenditure for railways .. .. .. (Spent in England for new equipment.)	**£70,000**
Deficit on railways (about)	**£60,000**
Total military expenditure on behalf of Iraq .. .. (Of this amount £3,500,000 is to be spent in the country.)	**£7,372,000**
Total ..	**£7,565,000**

The actual expenditure will be higher.

The military estimate includes £600,000 for the maintenance of Arab levies which are under British control. It is admitted that this figure will probably be exceeded. The levies consist of fewer than 4,000 men, the majority of whom will finish their service next spring and decline re-enlistment.

Our return for this outlay is the privilege of "advising" King Feisal's Government how to run the country successfully, and

incidentally the safeguarding of such vested interests as the oil monopoly. The latter, I believe, is content with our efforts. Iraq's attitude, as expressed by the King to me, will be one of satisfaction as long as we continue merely to " advise " and not to force our views on his Ministers.

The British taxpayer must decide whether it is worth while continuing to pour money into Mesopotamia for an indefinite period in order to maintain this purely artificial kingdom. Even the most fervent supporters there of the " stay-on " policy admit that we cannot annex the country and make it a productive unit of the British Empire. We are asked to stand ostensibly in the background, somewhat in the attitude of a rich and benevolent uncle who has been made responsible for the actions of an undisciplined, immature youth suddenly given unlimited freedom.

Mesopotamia must be developed in the fullest sense of the word, or let alone. Undoubtedly it has great possibilities. In order to realise them, millions must be spent in reclaiming the desert by irrigation ; in rebuilding the railway ; in policing the tribes and tapping the natural resources of the country. Private capital will not touch Iraq unless Britain is behind it. There is no confidence in an Arab State which can do as it likes.

Much might be accomplished in the way of cotton growing, but without protection against rapacious landowners wholesale development is impossible. The British Cotton Growers' Association has made a beginning, but only a beginning. I was told of one British firm which sought a long lease of land in the Amarah Valley (one of the richest sections of Mesopotamia) for the growing of cotton. The Iraq authorities refused to grant a lease for more than five years. Naturally the scheme fell through. No syndicate will expend money with the knowledge that its investment may be wiped out when it is on the point of yielding a profit. That is, no syndicate except the British Government.

When you suggest the desirability of evacuating Iraq, the supporters of the " stay-on " policy reply that " we must protect the oil supply," that it is vital to the safety of the Empire.

Oil is undoubtedly the richest asset of Mesopotamia. There are undeveloped fields in the north and on the Persian frontier which are engaging the anxious attention of private companies. The northern field was the subject of a pre-war concession by the Turkish Government which is now in dispute. The Anglo-Persian Company, the most powerful syndicate in the Middle East, is now

drilling along the Iraq-Persian frontier, and several wells are already producing.

The main oil supply, however, comes from the Anglo-Persian fields in South-Western Persia, 100 miles and more from Iraq. Pipe lines carry it through Persian territory to the great refineries at Abadan, on the Persian bank of the Shatt-ul-Arab River, between Basra and the Persian Gulf. Anglo-Persian influence is very great in this part of the Middle East. Its agents are scattered throughout the country. It has acquired the services of Sir Arnold Wilson—whose administration as Acting Civil Commissioner at Iraq was responsible for heavy expenditure of British money. He is the head of Strick, Scott and Co., general agents for the Anglo-Persian interests.

Sir Arnold is known as a " live wire." When he was in control of British civil affairs his energetic young men throughout the provinces were kept hard at work. His present position is more political than technical. He lives at Mohomarrah, on the Persian side of the river near Abadan, in a house which is more magnificent than the new residency at Baghdad. The dancing floor is spoken of with envy by the British colony at Basra. There is a powerful native ruler in the same town, but Sir Arnold Wilson eclipses him. One is the Sheikh of Mohomarrah. The other is known unofficially as " the King of Mohomarrah."

You will hear many arguments from the oil interests—and other private corporations tied financially to Iraq—why Great Britain should continue to sink money in Mesopotamia. You are reminded that oil is a " national asset," that the fields, developed and undeveloped, can only be safeguarded by an army of occupation, whatever outward form the government of the kingdom may take. And so on.

Yet oil is more expensive in Mesopotamia than in India. When petrol consumers at Basra complain that they pay London prices, the oil monopoly talks about " world parities."

Oil is the only available fuel in this coalless, woodless desert. The British taxpayer is expected to provide a standing army and other solid backing for private syndicates, and at the same time he is compelled to pay heavily for the commodity which is essential for keeping open lines of communication in the country. The Iraq railways—a losing concern still in the hands of the British taxpayer—must burn oil. One-tenth of their total expenditure this year is for oil. The Basra Port Directorate, another target for Anti-Waste criticism, pleads in extenuation of the heavy cost of maintenance

that oil from Abadan, 45 miles away, costs twice as much as it does at Karachi.

Eliminate the oil interests, and other private enterprises which look to British protection, and you have left a very definite feeling that we should come to Basra and cast off a Baghdad Administration which involves us in useless trouble and expense.

One fact stands out clearly in the mass of opinions I have gathered from British officials involved directly and indirectly in maintaining the new kingdom : that the present system of duplicate Governments is a costly experiment doomed to failure.

Some of these officials, it is true, profess to look on the situation more hopefully now that Iraq and Great Britain have signed a treaty. I am told by several of them that the revenue is coming in more freely. They augur from this that the tribes intend to settle down under King Feisal and do their part in building up the country. But this view is by no means unanimous.

One British expert with long experience of the East, who is employed under the Iraq Government, said : " We must settle, first of all, whether the country is to be ruled by Arabs or British. If by Arabs, then we must walk out. An Arab Government will not work with an adviser. An adviser is useless unless he can enforce his advice, which under present conditions he cannot do.

" If we are to make anything of the country and get even a partial return on the capital locked up here, we ought to run it like the Sudan. Get rid of the top-hamper—the over-crowded bureaucracy—and come down to an efficient working staff such as Kitchener created. If we take the bit in our teeth *and spend money* we can ' make a go ' of it. Otherwise not. The Arabs cannot maintain law and order themselves. That is certain. It is equally certain that if we go someone else will come in—probably the Turk.

" There is too much idealistic pro-Arab sentiment underlying our policy here. Hard facts have been obscured by the excessive desire to conciliate the native. We should keep our obligations, but at the same time realise the obvious shortcomings of the people. It is absurd to suppose that two or three years of European instruction will ensure the permanence of self-government.

" The High Commissioner's staff is big enough to run Iraq alone. There are still too many British officials on the Arab side."

Another British expert—likewise an official under Iraq—who may be described as " moderately pro-Arab " agreed with the latter statement.

"I think there could still be a reduction in the number of British employed under the Iraq Government," he said. "We have been suffering from an over-elaborate machine created in Sir Arnold Wilson's time. His administration was based on the supposition that Britain would finance it. Since then we have been trying to contract the machine to conform to present resources. For example, his health budget was nearly £470,000. Ours this year is £200,000.

"Revenue is coming in better. The prestige of the Government has been strengthened by Sir Percy Cox's firm attitude during the past two months. If we can tide over the next two years from a financial point of view, there is no reason why we should not be on a firm basis. A loan for capital expenditure would increase our revenue. Even £1,000,000 would help. I think it would give an almost immediate return."

The note of caution discernible in the above statement is significant.

A British adviser who is an enthusiastic pro-Arab was equally frank in admitting the present helplessness of the Mesopotamians saying: "It will take at least another two years' assistance to put Iraq on its feet. The army must be organised for defence before we can withdraw our troops. Money is essential, and the only hope is a loan backed by Great Britain.

"Seventy per cent. of the Baghdad people were pro-Turk when they heard of Mustapha Kemal's victory. They are like children. In the bazaars one heard the Turk glorified and the hope expressed that he would return. If he did come back, the same people would wish him away again as heartily as they did before the war. They don't know what they really do want.

"National sentiment cannot be expected yet. There is a small band of ardent Nationalists here who will, I think, eventually get the people behind them."

The most pessimistic note was sounded by another British official (a member of one of the Civil Services), who said:

"It is futile to talk of educating the people to the blessings of good government as preached by the disciples of the mandate. 'Good government' for them will mean, at the most, such a government as they were used to formerly—a government dominated largely by indifference, corruption, and intrigue.

"I think there is a trace of national feeling here and there, but the mass of the people simply want to be let alone, and to pay as little taxes as possible. We made the mistake in coming here as a governing Power in the first place, but our faces will be eternally

blackened if we slide out without setting up some kind of a decent show.

"British officials involved in the new scheme are naturally despondent, because they realise it is hopeless to look for an efficient administration such as we had when we were running the country. The most they can hope for is to keep Iraq from going absolutely to the dogs."

Another expert thus summarised political conditions in the provinces: "The Shiahs (a fanatical Moslem sect) number more than a million and half, and are a thorn in the flesh. They must have stern handling. They are opposed to all forms of temporal power, and fiercely resist the pretensions of the Baghdad Government.

"If we made war on them, we should be accused of warring on their religion. Now the Arabs can deal with them; or, rather, they *must* deal with them when they get an efficient army, and no imputation can be made against us by the Moslem world.

"The tribes generally are sound. We can certainly count on those in Basra, Amarah, and Kut. Nasrie is a storm centre. The Middle Euphrates tribes were divided recently into pro- and anti-British factions, and the fact that the pro-British tribes predominated prevented a rising at the time of King Feisal's illness.

"All the anti-British agitation can be traced to the holy cities—Kerbela and Nejud. Had we stopped at Kut on our advance and remained there, our position to-day would undoubtedly be far stronger. No holy cities would have then come under British administration."

These views are all from experienced British officials who are sincerely anxious to see Iraq succeed as an independent nation. The drift of their conversation is unmistakable. Self-government—as interpreted by a Baghdad ministry—is a burden rather than a blessing, in the eyes of the average Mesopotamian—excepting, of course, the minority who can fasten themselves to the national pay-roll.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE HOUSE OF COKKOS."

On the west bank of the River Tigris, about midway between the two pontoon bridges that connect it with Baghdad, stands a large and—in comparison with its neighbours—imposing structure surmounted by the Union Jack, which has attracted more notice and more criticism—most of it unfavourable—than any other building in this unprofitable desert kingdom.

It is the new British Residency, the headquarters of the High Commissioner for Iraq, for which the British taxpayer has already been charged nearly £160,000. The Army built it, and the Colonial Office is asked to "foot the bill." While these departments wrangle over their liability, the new Residency continues to be the target for hostile comment from within as well as from without King Feisal's artificial kingdom.

Arab officialdom, having resigned the bill to the British Government after paying £8,400 on account, watches the dispute with bland self-detachment.

The now notorious Residency has been christened by the Arabs "the House of 'Cokkos.'" Sir Percy Cox refers to it somewhat bitterly as "my palace."

In truth there is nothing palatial about the new Residency. It is a solid, substantial-looking, flat-roofed affair, a patchwork combination of new and old buildings which has about the same accommodation as a small country house. The work of building and re-modelling, which dragged on for more than two years, has already cost £120,000. A brand new Residency could have been put up for less, even in this land of extortionate charges for material and labour, where stone and wood have to be imported at great cost, and nothing is free except the sand of the desert.

The financial history of the new Residency is as follows:

	£
COST OF ORIGINAL BUILDINGS AND SITE	45,000
COST IN 1920–1921	
Labour	22,500
Material	18,000
Transportation and hire of stores	4,600
Overhead charges	8,100
Departmental and overseas charges	6,500
Total	59,700
COST IN 1921–1922	
Labour	20,000
Material	15,800
Direct control and workshop charges	2,700
Transportation and hire of stores	1,800
Overhead charges	7,300
Overseas charges	4,600
Total	52,200
SUMMARY OF COST	
Paid by Army, 1920–21	59,700
Paid by Iraq Government (1920–21)	8,400
Paid by Army, 1921–22	52,200
Cost of site and buildings	45,000
TOTAL COST OF RESIDENCY TO DATE	£165,300

The plea for the Residency is that British prestige demanded the adequate housing of his Majesty's High Commissioner, with facilities for fulfilling the usual social obligations of a British official. The cost is defended on the ground that everything in Mesopotamia is expensive.

Which is true. But the British taxpayer may wish to know if a new Residency was necessary, and if so, whether he ought to pay so heavily for lodging an administration that can only advise, and not administer.

On the opposite side of the Tigris, at the south end of Baghdad city, is the old British Residency, even larger and more imposing than its successor in Baghdad West. But the old Residency appears to be irretrievably lost to the civil government. It is now the General Headquarters of the British forces in Iraq. It was the biggest and most comfortable building in Baghdad, and when the Army entered G.H.Q. went to it like a homing pigeon. The tentacles of the General Staff spread north and south and laid a firm grip on the best private houses as well. G.H.Q. settled down, apparently for all time.

This policy may have been beyond criticism while the Army remained the supreme power. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone in authority, however, that when military control ended and Mesopotamia was camouflaged as the kingdom of Iraq the British civil representative was entitled to his traditional home.

A large and elaborate cantonment for the accommodation of all British and Indian troops, Air Force units, and Ordnance stores, with workshops, power plant and hospital, was laid down in the desert, five miles from Baghdad, and called Hinaidi. It is still under construction. Unless a close watch is kept on expenditure, Hinaidi Cantonment will probably continue to be "improved" for years to come. Provision seems to have been made for all the machinery of an army of occupation—except General Headquarters! That, apparently, is to remain permanently in the old Residency, its tentacles still wrapped around rows of fine Arab houses, the owners of which clamour vainly for re-possession. Army messes and billets and high military and civil officials are spread over them. I do not think that anything less than an earthquake will ever evict them.

When Sir Percy Cox became Civil Commissioner he wanted an official house—and there was none. The administration of Sir Arnold Wilson (Acting Civil Commissioner) had been flinging British money about in an amazingly liberal manner. Plans for a new Baghdad ten miles long, which would have startled even Haroun-al-Raschid, were prepared by Sir Arnold's "live" young men, who studied the Lutyens scheme for a new Delhi and decided to eclipse it while the money held out. It is as well the British taxpayer heard little or nothing of this scheme. He would have died from shock.

Miles of modern official residences, public buildings, bungalows, churches, schools, parks, boulevards, and business houses, added to a kind of glorified Aldershot and Woolwich, were to cover the desert between old Baghdad and the River Diala, a tributary of the Tigris.

The picture of this fulfilled dream, which was prepared by one of the Wilson architects, is very beautiful. Fortunately the strong arm of economy smothered the grandiose scheme in time, but the spirit of extravagance which inspired it was still abroad when Sir Percy Cox said he must have a house to live in.

It has been explained to me that the authorities thought Iraq would be a British Protectorate run on Arab taxes without help from home. Public works were then under the jurisdiction of a joint military and civil administration, at the head of which was the

Chief Engineer, R.E., attached to General Headquarters. To him was entrusted the task of building Sir Percy Cox a home fit for a High Commissioner to live in.

Before the work had proceeded very far, it was decided that Mesopotamia should have a king and an independent government. Then the military and civil public works departments were divided once more, and the Chief Engineer went back to his former duties. The military authorities decided, however, that he was to complete the new Residency.

The new Government had paid three instalments of the cost, a total of about £8,400, when the Colonial Office took over British civil finance in Iraq. Thereupon King Feisal's administration decided to leave the remainder of the bill to Great Britain. Sir Percy Cox wrote to the Colonial Office regarding the latter's liability. Meanwhile the question arose whether the work should be stopped until funds were assured.

The High Commissioner, I am told, again insisted that he was waiting for his house. The Chief Engineer consulted the Staff Paymaster at G.H.Q. and the Financial Adviser from the War Office, who agreed that he should continue building operations. The War Office was notified of this decision, but, in the words of one of the officials here, " they didn't take any notice for a long time."

Eventually, however, they did " take notice." The report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for 1920-21 says :

> " It appears that . . . Army funds (in Mesopotamia) have been expended in 1920–21 in what were called locally ' contributed services,' without adequate steps being taken to secure that the ' contribution ' expected was duly received. The most important case that has emerged is that of a residence in course of erection for the High Commissioner at Baghdad. . . Completion of the new residence (after separation of the military and civil works departments) was entrusted to the military works directorate, the War Office agreeing with the Treasury's approval that works might be carried out for the civil government on an agency basis—i.e., on payment in cash for all services rendered and stores supplied.
>
> " The War Office did not know of the specific service in question until July, 1921. . . . The total expenditure in 1920 amounted to some £55,000, but no portion of this has been repaid."

The nucleus of the new Residency was an estate on the river bank

formerly owned by the late Kiazim Pasha, a brother-in-law of the ex-Sultan Abdul Hamid, who was exiled from Constantinople. It had been used latterly as a British hospital.

The property comprised a two-storey brick residence standing back about 30 ft. from the high brick embankment which skirts the river, a separate two-storey building on the north which was the women's quarters, and a third building—also detached—on the south. A narrow terrace lay in front of the buildings, giving an unobstructed view of the river and of the main city on the other side. Behind the residence was a garden of fair size, laid out by the late owner.

The scheme of reconstruction involved extensive repairs and additions to the existing buildings. A new brick wing, harmonising architecturally with the old residence, was erected on the south side, linking it with the building at that end. The latter was reserved for the offices of Sir Percy Cox, his Cabinet of advisers, and their staff of clerks.

The new wing contained a large drawing-room on the ground floor and a bedroom above. On the west side, facing the garden, a suite of small rooms was added comprising a room for aides-de-camp, adjoining the main entrance ; a boudoir for Lady Cox, and a small study for the High Commissioner. The ground floor of the old main building was converted into a large dining-room. Adjoining it on the garden side is a smaller ante-room which contains a much-talked-of fountain. This is no more than a length of 2 in. iron pipe projecting from a basin lined with green tiles, perhaps 4 ft. across, and from this pipe three thin jets of water are thrown into the air.

The old harem building, in which Sir Percy and Lady Cox lived for a year while the main structure was being finished, is to be used as a guest house for distinguished personages passing through Baghdad. The guest house is an old two-storey house containing seven rooms. The room on the ground floor, formerly used by the High Commissioner as his dining-room, is dark and gloomy, with small iron-barred windows, and suggests a detention cell.

Between the guest house and the main building, two new one-storey detached brick buildings have been added, one a ballroom, the other a billiards-room. They are unadorned structures that look like twin garages. They are panelled in wood, and the ballroom, which can accommodate about 50 couples, has a hardwood floor and a small alcove for an orchestra. Sir Percy Cox has left the

choice of a billiards-table to his successor, and the room is at present empty. There are no servants' quarters attached to the guest house, and these are included in the estimate for additional expenditure this year.

The house is comfortably but not elaborately furnished. The most obvious result of two years' labour and the expenditure of £120,000 is a group of reception-rooms which are less gorgeous than those in many of the lesser British legations abroad. A visitor who was not called upon to decide whether the Residency itself is a necessity, and who knew nothing of the cost, would readily admit that the British High Commissioner was housed in a very unostentatious way.

Work was begun in the summer of 1920. Native labour was dilatory and at times very unsatisfactory. Indian foremen are said to have gone ahead faster than their instructions warranted. Some of the work was done over twice. The old house was found to be in a bad condition. Rotten timbers had to be replaced; the foundations required under-pinning owing to their proximity to the river. One roof sank 3 inches and had to be given new supports.

The bricks were made by Army labour. Some of the timber, the electrical fittings, and other material had to be imported. I am assured that war stores were used as far as possible. The bulk of the timber is said to have come from reserves already in the country, likewise the costly filter plant, which, I am told, would have been unsaleable otherwise.

At the present time the secretariat wing is still in the hands of native workmen. The first floor is in a state of chaos, with Arab carpenters and labourers swarming up the narrow staircase, while the High Commissioner and his advisers try to carry on their labours.

The High Commissioner's work-room is a dingy, badly lighted room on the first floor of the secretariat, flanked by two small anterooms where his secretaries are hemmed in by piles of documents. There is nothing ornate or imposing about this rickety Arab house, which is crowded with clerks and officials.

Exception is taken in certain quarters in Baghdad to the figures given above as representing the actual cost of the Residency. It is argued that, inasmuch as a great deal of material came from war stores and labour already mobilised for Army requirements was utilised to a considerable extent, the real expenditure ought not to be rated so high.

One official who protests against the figures I have given above said to me:

"I estimate that the British taxpayer actually put his hand in his pocket for about 6 lakhs (£39,996) of rupees in hard cash which would not have been spent otherwise. Add to this about 5 lakhs (£33,330) for enrolled labour, war and ordnance stores, transport, etc., and about 2 lakhs (£13,332) for overhead charges, and you have a total cost of 13 lakhs (£86,658)."

A lakh at the nominal rate of exchange is £6,666, and when I pointed out that this estimate was very small indeed in comparison with the official charges, my informant said that during a portion of the period when the charges were incurred the rupee was at 10 and 12 to £1 sterling instead of 15 to £1 as it is to-day!

The cost of labour in Iraq is much higher than before the war. Skilled carpenters and masons, for example, receive 6s. 8d. to 7s. 6d. a day, as against 1s. to 1s. 4d. in pre-war days. Bricks have cost as much as £10 per 1,000, as against £2 6s. before the war.

As a whole, the Residency is not good value for the money spent on it. Its existence, even at this excessive cost, is defended on the ground that British prestige would suffer if his Majesty's representative was not housed with a certain degree of dignity.

If Iraq was a British Protectorate there might be some excuse for establishing the permanent Government in self-contained quarters, with reasonable facilities for entertainment. But the High Secretariat is really the home of an expensive British Cabinet which functions independently of the Arab Cabinet across the river.

Ought the British taxpayer to hand over £160,000 and more to house a Government which does not govern?

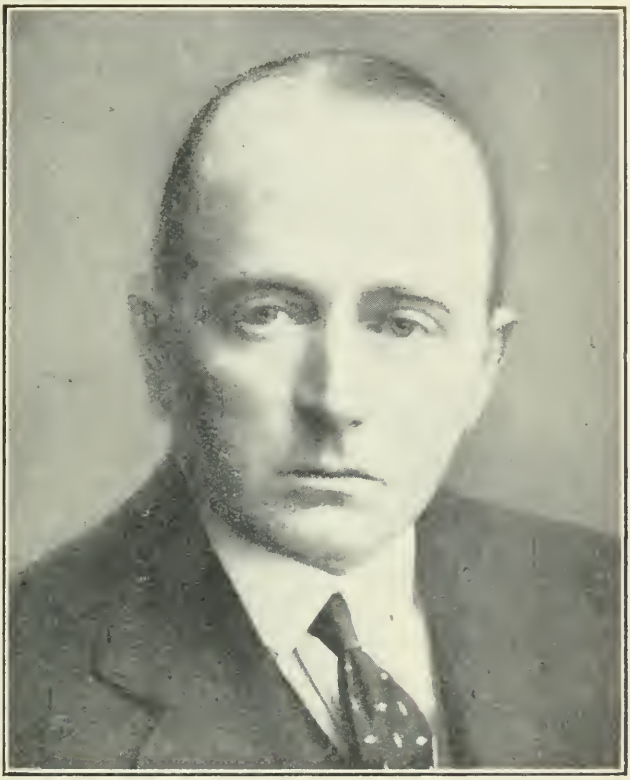


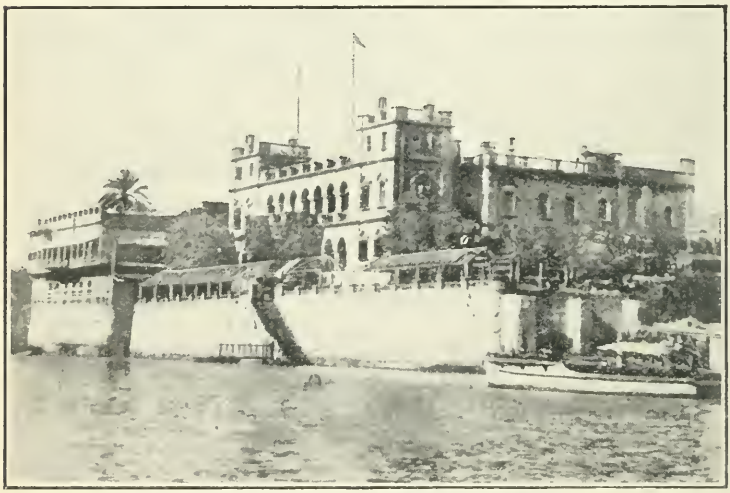
Photo by Andrew Paterson, Inverness

SIR PERCIVAL PHILLIPS

Sir Percival Phillips, K.B.E., who conducted the special investigations in Mesopotamia on behalf of the *Daily Mail*

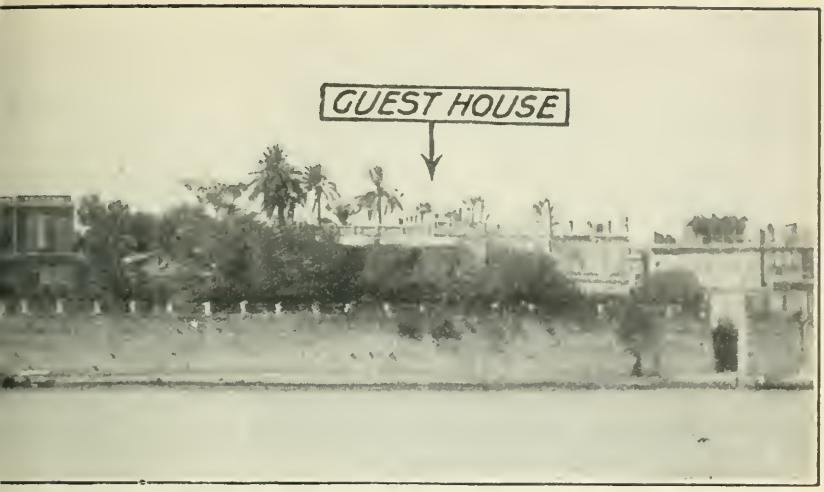
"THE HOUSE OF COKKOS"—THI

A photograph of the new British Residency in Baghdad, for which tl has investigated Mesopotamian affairs for the *Daily Mail*, describes it accommodation



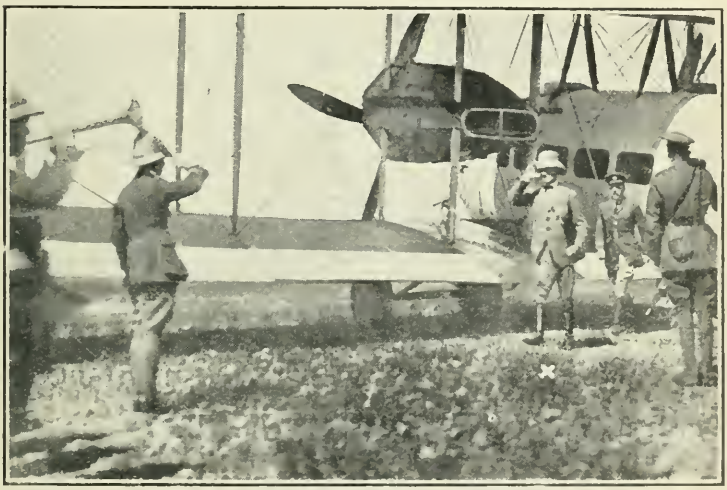
THE OLD RESIDENCY

The old British Residency at Baghdad, now the General Headquarters of the Royal Air Force. The High Commissioner is established in a new Residency which has cost the British taxpayer, up to date, nearly £160,000. For the present year the expense of this establishment is £80,000, of which half is borne by the Iraq Government.



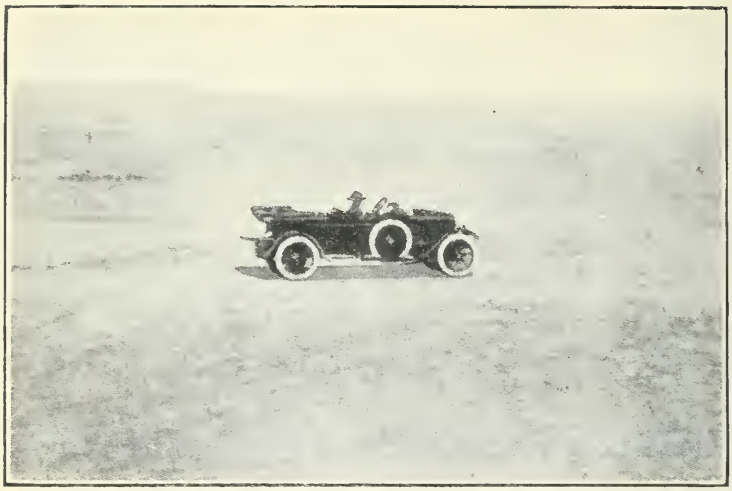
ITISH RESIDENCY IN BAGHDAD

axpayer has had to find nearly £160,000. Sir Percival Phillips, who hwork combination of new and old buildings with about the same country house.



TAX COLLECTING BY BOMB

Sir Percival Phillips describes how the Royal Air Force is being utilised to get in the Mesopotamian revenue by bombing old women and recalcitrant men. Sir Percy Cox (x), the High Commissioner, preceded by his guard of honour, arriving by aeroplane to meet a sheikh north of Ramadi.



TYPICAL MESOPOTAMIAN SCENERY

Country that costs the British Taxpayer £8,000,000 a year.—"Typical Mesopotamian scenery (one mile east of Baghdad)" is the description applied to this photograph reproduced from "The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, 1920," by Lt.-Gen. Sir Aylmer Haldane, published by William Blackwood & Sons. The picture is an eloquent commentary on the waste of British money in Iraq.

OUR "WAR FLEET" IN MESOPOTAMIA

Derelict river steamers at Basra—part of our "War Fleet" on the Tigris. They cost £80,000 each, and no one will now buy them!

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VAST AERODROME IN THE DESERT

Five miles beyond the South Gate of Baghdad is a patch of arid, dust-ridden plain some 2,400 acres in extent, where British money is being scattered with a lavish hand. It is the new military cantonment of Hinaidi, the principal base of the British forces in Mesopotamia.

The machine-made State of Iraq is supposed to be self-governing, yet we continue to cover the desert with workshops, barracks, and warehouses sufficient for an army of occupation for twenty years to come. The Arab Government contemplate this vast undertaking with justifiable complacency. By the time Hinaidi is practically finished they hope to see us evacuate Iraq, leaving this costly undertaking in their hands—as a gift.

You motor to Hinaidi over a level road that is useless during the rains. The car swerves southward at the end of Baghdad and ploughs through choking dust into the desert. A mile or more from the city you pass the fragment of Sir A. T. Wilson's civil cantonment, which was to have been part of his new Baghdad building scheme—a scheme 10 miles long, calculated to eclipse New Delhi.

News of this undertaking reached London in time to kill it. About 20 modern houses had already been built in the civil cantonment, and these are the sole occupants of the plain—comfortable buildings rather like London villas in appearance, used at present by British officials.

It was intended to join the civil and military cantonments in this 10-mile modern city. To-day, however, there is a gap of a mile and a half between the villas at Aliyieh and the desert settlement, which is to be a combination of Aldershot, Croydon, and Woolwich. The military cantonment has been contracted, but it is still of sufficient magnitude to astonish the traveller who passes that way.

As far as the eye can see the desert is covered with brick, galvanised iron, and mud buildings, aeroplane hangars, water tanks, tall chimneys, cranes, ordnance stores, a wireless plant, pumping-station, a network of light railways inhabited by busy miniature

trains, repair shops, and other adjuncts of a great permanent military depot which is to accommodate a minimum of 6,000 men. Hundreds of native labourers are spread in gangs over the plain, all of them busy.

This British military city is enclosed by a great " bund " or dyke —or, rather, a group of dykes—to protect it from inundation when the river is in flood. More than one expert, in discussing the efficacy of these embankments, has expressed doubt as to the immunity of the cantonment if the floods are exceptionally severe. The plain is as flat as a table.

The population of Hinaidi will comprise 6 squadrons of aeroplanes, 3 or 4 battalions of infantry, 3 armoured-car companies, 1 company of sappers and miners, and 1 battery.

The purpose of this expensive enterprise is twofold. In normal times it is the nerve centre of the British military and air forces in Mespot. In the event of an Arab rising, it will become a fort sheltering all British officials and their wives and families, and the commercial community. The High Commissioner would have to scrap his new Residency and hasten to Hinaidi with his archives. General Headquarters would be forced to leave its comfortable riverside offices in the old Residency and function under service conditions inside the dyke.

When the question of expense is mentioned, you are told that this new undertaking is justifiable because it will bring all British interests into one camp. Yet the civil and military headquarters have taken up permanent positions in the heart of Baghdad, five miles away, with no intention of fleeing into the desert unless Mesopotamia rises against them.

And the cost ?

The Air estimates for the current year include £438,000 " for additional accommodation and improvements and additions to existing improvements " at Hinaidi. It seems certain that this sum will be exceeded. The total estimate for new works in Iraq is £1,350,000. Some of the details are :

	£
Total estimate for wireless installations	16,200
Electrical and mechanical services and petrol storage ..	45,000
Emergency services	10,000
Liquidation of war contracts and completion of necessary war services	133,000
Minor new works, additions and alterations under £2,000 each, and ordinary repairs, renewals and maintenance	215,000
Additional accommodation at Basra and improvements to existing accommodation	69,000
Improvements and additions to existing various stations	21,000

The Army estimates for the year ending March 31 next show that, from April 1 to September 30, when the Royal Air Force took over the military establishment in Iraq, the total cost (Army expenditure), including maintenance of troops, hospitals, Army pay, and transport by land and sea, was to be £4,712,000. The estimates provided for the reduction of the Iraq Forces during the first half of the year by three Indian battalions (and ancillary troops), to be returned to India, and by one howitzer battery, to be returned to Egypt. After October 1 only one British and two Indian battalions were to be retained.

Owing to the Turkish crisis, all nine battalions of infantry which comprised the main force in Iraq early this year have been retained. This will materially increase the cost.

The Royal Air Force has undertaken the military control of Iraq with keen enthusiasm. This is the first great chance it has had to show what aeroplanes can do as the backbone of a field force. Officers and men alike are animated by the determination to make the best possible showing. It does not seem likely that economy will be invariably the first consideration in perfecting the new organisation.

True, the chief engineer in charge of construction at Hinaidi is keeping a careful eye on expenditure. For example, he believes that the new hospital, which will be ready for British troops next April, will cost only £130,000, instead of £200,000, as estimated. Two double blocks and two half blocks are now nearing completion, with accommodation for 400 patients. The section for Indian patients has not been begun.

But in spite of a reduction here and there, the fact remains that Hinaidi, from first to last, is a very costly undertaking. If we are not to remain in the country for some years to come, the amount expended will be so much money thrown away. The cantonment has a perimeter of 14,000 yards. Whether, in the event of a siege, it could be held by three battalions of infantry, even backed by squadrons of aeroplanes, is a matter of some doubt.

Light railways alone, built this year and last, are costing £40,000. Aerodromes on the west bank of the Tigris have had to be shifted. A complete water supply was vital to the life of the cantonment, and mains have been laid from the river through the desert enclosure, and a powerful pumping station has been put up to feed them. A system of ditches or small canals has been carved out of the plain to irrigate it in summer and pump it dry during the rains.

The barracks are far from luxurious. I was shown Air Force officers' quarters, which consisted of a narrow room in a one-storey mud building, a partition separating the small ante-room from the equally cramped sleeping room behind. The most elaborate buildings are relics of the "Greater Baghdad" scheme. They are comfortable, commodious residences which were put up as warrant officers' married quarters. Why these should have been built first is one of the little mysteries of "Greater Baghdad." But there they are, and the Air Force is very grateful.

No more unattractive site for a British camp can be found anywhere. Dust storms envelop Hinaidi for hours at a time and the broad landing ground is hidden in swirling clouds. The sun beats down at midsummer with furnace-like heat—the temperature frequently rises to 125 deg.—and there is no shade. Stunted young trees brought from India struggle for existence at the side of some of the streets which intersect the cantonment.

One avenue is lined with canteen tents run by native contractors; there is a strange little kinema building of wood, and an officers' club with walls of mud. Next year Hinaidi hopes to have a soldiers' institute and a garrison church. One hears of plans for a light railway from the camp to the edge of Baghdad, so that the troops can escape more easily from the devastating life in the desert. Thus one outlay leads to another. You cannot build a complete Aldershot plus Croydon in the middle of an arid plain without paying heavily and steadily even for the essentials of existence under such conditions.

I am assured that war stores have been utilised as far as possible in building Hinaidi. Girders for bridging appear incongruously as roof beams in low barrack buildings. Nearly every conceivable kind of building material seems to have been imported into Mesopotamia, sufficient for military operations for a generation. They tell me that much of the stuff is unsaleable, so it is being worked into the architecture of Hinaidi.

All the outlay by the Air Force is not at Hinaidi. The policy of concentration means additional expenditure elsewhere. Basra and Mosul are the secondary bases for the new organisation, and both want money.

Next year more troops at Basra will be moved into the "defended area." A group headquarters is to be built there, and a wing headquarters at Mosul. The 15 landing bases throughout Iraq which are kept up by the Air Force will require a certain outlay. The

dyke enclosing Hinaidi is to be widened next year and more buildings are to be put up.

If we do not intend to hold Mesopotamia with troops and aeroplanes, the creation of Hinaidi cantonment is a criminal waste of public money. The heedless extravagance which prevailed two years ago has been materially lessened, and, since the outcry at home over the new Residency, British civil and military authorities alike have been keeping an anxious eye on expenditure.

Nevertheless, they are committed to projects which are adding steadily to the burden of the British taxpayer—projects which under present conditions will never justify their cost.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SWARM OF OFFICIALS

Times have changed since Baghdad was ruled by one man and a bowstring.

It takes three Governments, functioning simultaneously, to realise the blessed ideal of independence in Mesopotamia: two civil Governments, one of which does not govern but merely advises, and a military Government which believes its time will come.

Iraq has a Government held up by British advisers, which occupies the centre of the stage, and is supposed to administer the country. Great Britain has a Government which sits in the wings and tries to give the principal actors their proper cues. The third Government controls troops and aeroplanes, and its contribution to the general scheme of independence is the dropping of bombs on wayward villages.

The cost of this triple alliance for the present year is:

Iraq Government	**£3,700,000**
British Civil Government	**£193,000**
British Military Government	**£7,372,000**
Total	**£11,265,000**

Iraq pays for its Government as far as circumstances will allow. We pay for our two in any case.

Allowing for recent reductions in staff by the Geddes Committee, the size of the civil bureaucracies is astonishing. Take the Iraq Government. There is, first of all, a Council of Ministers presiding over the usual Departments: Interior, Finance, Communications, and Works, Defence, Justice, and Education. The personalities of the Ministers mean nothing outside Iraq. The ablest of them is Saisun Effendi, a Jew; the remainder include two other ex-members of the Turkish Parliament. As a whole they have not the confidence of the nation. They are described to me as suspect or inexperienced.

Behind each Minister is a British adviser, paid by Iraq. He sits in the next room and is usually overworked. Each adviser has an assistant, and an assistant to an assistant.

The three provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, which comprise the kingdom of Iraq, are divided into eleven divisions, following the old Turkish model of government. Each division has at its head a Mutasserif (local governor) behind whom is a British adviser with an assistant.

There are 24 British advisers attached to the Iraq police, which has a native director and a British inspector-general, while every local commandant is reinforced by a British expert, recruited from the home, Indian, or Egyptian police. The Arab army has 23 advisers.

Thus the entire organisation of government is permeated by British advisers. The Public Health Department is nominally under a native director, but Colonel Graham, of the Indian Medical Service, is the real head with the title of inspector-general. Several British civilian doctors hold posts under him, and the new Baghdad general hospital is staffed wholly by British doctors and nurses. There are from 8 to 10 British experts in the Irrigation Department, and others are employed by the Public Works Department. Even the Wakf (the department in charge of religious buildings) has a British adviser from the Sudan. The Government Press is under a British director.

When Sir Arnold Wilson was acting Civil Commissioner there were 140 young British officials distributed throughout Iraq. His administration has been strongly criticised because of its cost, but undoubtedly his active young men collected taxes with far greater celerity than their Arab successors.

It might naturally be thought that this far-reaching chain of British advisers, all of whom have had more or less experience in their work, is sufficient to train Iraq in self-government on sound British lines.

Not so. You forget the British High Secretariat.

This is a separate conglomeration of British experts, gathered together in a wing of the new Residency, in Baghdad West. Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner, presides over it. The members are called secretaries, and they deal with the same subjects as the Arab advisory group across the river. They are :

CIVIL SECRETARY (who may be likened to a Minister of the Interior).

Deputy Civil Secretary.
Assistant Secretary.
Internal Oriental Secretary (who deals with the various tribes).
External Oriental Secretary (who deals with affairs outside Iraq).
Under-Secretary to the High Commissioner (who is the head of the passport bureau and performs consular duties).
Private Secretary.
Financial Secretary.
Assistant Financial Secretary.
Judicial Secretary.

These secretaries have their own assistants and clerks. They are lodged on two floors of an old Turkish building now called the Secretariat, which has been connected with the Residency.

The High Commissioner and his secretaries cost £80,000 this year, half the burden falling on the Iraq Exchequer.

Everyone is hard at work. You find the Iraq Minister of Finance toiling away all day. Alongside him, the British Acting Adviser is immersed in documents pertaining to the tangled monetary affairs of the kingdom. Go to the Residency and you will find the Financial Secretary also slogging away at financial affairs. They work early and late. All the machinery of government revolves madly; you can hardly see it for the wheels, and the wheels within wheels.

There is just as much industry at the home of the third Government—at the Air Force headquarters in the old Residency.

It is crowded with busy staff officers and clerks. The offices, with their wall maps and laden desks, fill this spacious building, and there does not seem to be over-much room. Staff cars are constantly passing and repassing between headquarters and the new cantonment at Hinaidi. There you find even greater industry: new buildings going up, Kurdish workmen swarming over the plain, transport camels and light railways carting material about.

Cynical observers ask each other what is the good of it all?

Self-government has fallen on Iraq like an avalanche, and the victims cannot find their feet. The weighty structure which we have set over them cannot be supported. Instead of first teaching them to stand, we have tried to make them run.

The Government was handed over to the Arabs two years ago, and during the first six months of its existence practically all posts of importance passed to natives, mostly ex-officers of the Turkish

Army who had no experience in administrative work. The result has been to clog the machinery of government with dead wood. We built it overnight and are now surprised that it will not work smoothly.

The double sets of advisers toil away, and the Air Force builds cheerfully in the desert, but their combined expenditure has not materially benefited the country at large. The people are far from enthusiastic over their new home Government. Half of last year's revenue came from the agrarian population, which saw that only the towns benefited, and that money went into the pockets of the officials, as in the good old pre-war days.

Real nationalism has been a minor factor; the predominant movement has been a scramble for Government posts. Far-seeing Arabs are leaving the provinces and camping in Baghdad, where they can pull wires and get a job. Despite the Geddes Axe, which passed that way, Ministries are multiplying their accumulation of limpets and paying them too well.

A complaint to this effect came to me from one of the British officials working under Iraq. Arab employees in his Department have been enticed to other branches by higher salaries than they are worth.

The so-called Effendi (professional) class, which does not represent the bulk of Iraq's population, is strongly for self-government, for to them it spells self-advancement. Corruption exists as it did when Baghdad had a Turkish governor. We cannot enforce the principles of common honesty; we can only "advise."

A few of the higher officials held responsible posts under the Turks, but the majority come from subordinate positions where they had no executive power or experience. They have put forward very few logical proposals for the development of the country, and most of the officials lack the power of concentration to carry such projects through.

Old-fashioned sheikhs who rule the desert tribes can make nothing of the multiplicity of Governments in Baghdad. They still cling to the primitive belief that one man and a bowstring is worth an army of advisers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"WE MUST BE HELPED"

"If the Iraq Government is to carry on, we must be helped," said Saisun Effendi, Minister of Finance, to me during a discussion of the internal financial crisis.

This may be interpreted by the British taxpayer as a warning that, in addition to paying at least £7,500,000 this year for the upkeep of the elaborate British civil and military organisations in Mesopotamia, he must "lend" millions of pounds more to the Mesopotamians, and also make good the deficit in revenue, if King Feisal's artificial kingdom is to be held together.

The Iraq Government is costing this year £3,700,000. The deficit, according to Saisun Effendi, will be about £235,000. Unpaid taxes (principally land revenue) aggregating £435,000, remain over from last year. Thus the new Government finds itself faced with a loss of at least £670,000 during the first two years of its existence. In the end Great Britain will naturally have to make this good. If the Iraq taxpayer declines to pay for the maintenance of the Government we have given him the British taxpayer must foot the bill.

This year's budget, according to the statement furnished me by the Ministry of Finance, estimates the total revenue at £3,564,397, of which £1,196,733 is from Customs and £1,032,734 from land revenue and taxes on natural produce. But these figures have had to be reduced materially owing to the sharp decline in import trade and inability to collect taxes. In some districts, Amarah, for example, the people have paid fairly well, but generally speaking, they stubbornly refuse to contribute to the new Government, and even bombing has not stimulated internal revenue to the extent expected.

A Geddes Committee recently cut the expenditure (on paper) by about £367,000, but the drop in revenue proved to be so much greater than was anticipated that this saving has been to a large extent reduced.

King Feisal and his household will cost £70,000 this year, as against £100,000 last year. He is less expensive than the British

High Commissioner, and Secretariat, which is rated at £80,000, of which amount the Iraq Government is supposed to pay half.

The cost of national defence (for an army of less than 4,000 men) is estimated at £600,000—and the Ministry concerned wants more. A like sum is asked for the maintenance of the police. Internal administration, including the Baghdad headquarters and provincial establishments, will cost £380,000. Other items of the budget are :

Public health	£200,000
Irrigation and public works	£500,000
Education	£135,000
Posts and Telegraphs	£197,000
Pensions	£147,000
Constitutional Assembly	£27,000
Council of Ministers	£10,000

Iraq's chief source of revenue is the Customs. A tax of 15 per cent. is imposed on the majority of imports. Motor-cars, jewellery, musical instruments, silverware, requisites for games and sports, kinematograph films, clocks and watches, sugar, and false pearls now pay 20 per cent. ad valorem. Whisky is taxed a minimum of £1 5s. per imperial gallon.

Two causes are ascribed for the alarming decrease in Customs revenue this year : the almost complete stoppage of imports from Persia, and the flooding of the commercial markets with war stores at sacrifice prices.

Persian merchants are suffering from the general trade depression and lack of money, and they find the Iraq Customs dues almost prohibitive. Consequently commercial intercourse between Baghdad, Basra, and the great caravan centres south of Teheran has been greatly diminished.

A severe shock has come from the Disposals Board. Mesopotamia has been crammed with every conceivable kind of war material, from steel girders to thousands of tins of condensed milk. These stocks have been steadily diminished by the sale to local merchants of many kinds of imports which otherwise would have paid Customs duty, and thereby benefited the Iraq Government. Up to March 31 last over £3,500,000 was realised from Disposals Board sales.

British firms in Baghdad and Basra complain bitterly of the indiscriminate unloading of goods at prices which the ordinary importer cannot compete with. One member of the British Chamber of Commerce of Baghdad told me that supplies equal to at least two years' imports have been thrown on the market at absurdly low

figures. They range from cigarettes and tobacco to blankets, boots and clothing, all dumped duty free from the Army depots.

Canteen stores are now subject to duty if sold by the Disposals Board, or outside the Army, but other articles still escape this import tax. The result has been to clog the shops and bazaars with a variety of merchandise at a valuation which ordinary importers cannot meet. It is estimated that Iraq has lost £200,000 in import duties in this way.

Criticism of the Disposals Board does not end here. I am told that while it has been selling war stores at sacrifice prices many of the same articles have been imported from England for Army requirements at ordinary market rates. Thus the British taxpayer has paid the current price at home, plus shipping charges, for material for the troops, while similar stores already in Mesopotamia have been steadily disposed of to local firms at a lower figure.

The deficit due to non-payment of taxes is considered by Saisun Effendi a temporary embarrassment which will be removed now that the treaty has been signed with Great Britain. He, with other Iraq officials, thinks that the recent political agitation was the principal factor in holding up land revenue. This may have been true to some extent, but British experts on Mesopotamia have expressed doubt to me of anything like a universal response to the tax collector's notice solely because the country is at peace.

The Minister of Finance thinks that a great part, if not all, of the arrears of last year will be collected before the end of the present financial year. Other students of Iraq finance are not so optimistic.

Notwithstanding that the main sources of revenue are Customs and land taxation, the Geddes Committee was unable to touch these important questions. It could do no more than cut down the number of British officials by 35, reduce the salaries of Ministers from £200 to £120 per month, and effect such minor economies as compression of Ministerial staffs, reduction of British ration allowances, and the stoppage of free passages for officials' wives from England.

The committee consisted of Saisun Effendi (for some years a member of the Turkish Parliament from Baghdad), Tewfik Bey, then Minister of the Interior, Nadji Swadi, a barrister, and the judicial and financial advisers to the High Commissioner.

The saving on paper of £367,000 this year has been reduced not only by the additional decline in revenue, but also by the grants of

compensation and travelling allowance to British officials who were dispensed with.

"We must be helped," repeated Saisun Effendi during our conversation on the poverty of Iraq. "We want a loan of at least £1,000,000 a year for essential public works, mostly for irrigation, also for new Government offices and buildings, schools, and roads

"We are spending £80,000 this year on the new Hindie barrage (midway between the ruins of Babylon and the holy city of Kerbela), but this should be regarded as capital expenditure. The country benefited is very rich. Capital devoted to small irrigation schemes is usually returned in three years. Irrigation on a large scale is vital to the prosperity of Iraq."

Various projects for raising money have been discussed. One minor suggestion made in Baghdad was for a temporary advance of £100,000 through the principal banks.

Iraq undoubtedly needs money. The Arabs hope that the British taxpayer, who has flung so many millions into the desert, will continue to scatter his decreasing wealth in the effort to make this experiment at self-government a success.

They are ready to stand by him to his last shilling.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BRITAIN'S BAD RAILWAY BARGAIN

Although Mesopotamia has been converted into an independent State supposed to be self-supporting as well as self-governing, the British taxpayer continues to run certain public services at a loss because the Iraq Government cannot take them over.

The Arabs are content that we should maintain the railways at our own expense. Ours is the deficit as well as the labour.

Last year's loss on the railways was at least £250,000. The deficit this year, according to official estimates, will be about £60,000 ; but members of the British Chamber of Commerce of Baghdad, who have had a good deal to do with land communications, consider that this is an extremely conservative figure. The financial secretary to the High Commissioner, on the other hand, thinks it may be reduced before the end of the year.

The deficit is divided as follows:

Basra-Baghdad line	£5,000
Baghdad-Shargat line	£55,000

The Basra-Baghdad line is the main system linking the capital with the Persian Gulf. The Shargat line, extending north from Baghdad, has been almost exclusively a military undertaking, which is the reason given for the loss in maintaining it.

The greatest scheme undertaken by the military was the construction of the line from Basra to Baghdad. It is a metre-gauge (3 ft. 3 in.) single-way system, beginning at Makinah, the military base in the desert, four miles from Basra, and extending along the Euphrates, through Hilla and past the ruins of Bayblon to Baghdad West, the new railway cantonment built at great cost on that side of the Tigris. Its total length is about 300 miles.

Northward from Baghdad there is a standard-gauge railway extending as far as Shargat, a distance of 200 miles. This was built before the war by German engineers as a link in the Constantinople-Baghdad scheme. Mosul is 70 miles beyond Shargat, and traffic for the northern centre has to be sent on by motor-car.

The present terminus of the Baghdad railway from Aleppo is

Nisibin, 110 miles north-west of Mosul, so that there is a gap of less than 200 miles in the through line from Constantinople to the Persian Gulf.

The military also built a metre-gauge line from Baghdad to Quaritu, on the Persian frontier (130 miles), with a branch 50 miles long to Kifri; also sundry branch lines which are now disappearing, as there is no commercial use for them. The Baghdad-Kut and the Baghdad-Fellujah lines, which were important enough during military operations, had a deficit of £10,000 each last year, and they have been torn up.

Despite the amount spent on it, the Basra-Baghdad line can only be described as a makeshift affair. It winds through the desert in an insecure fashion, and trains sway over the undulating road-bed like ships in a heavy sea. Portions of the road-bed have swung out of alignment, and 25 miles an hour is the maximum speed consistent with safety.

One high railway official admitted to me that if used for heavy commercial traffic, practically the entire line would have to be rebuilt. He mentioned one strip between 40 and 50 miles long which badly needs re-alignment.

The equipment is miscellaneous and undependable. Seventy different kinds of stock can be found between Basra and the northern terminals. Many of the engines are worn out, and the carriages are dilapidated, broken survivors of the heavy traffic of war. One carriage in which I travelled threatened to fall apart when we were in motion. The door of the sleeping compartment slipped off in the night and wedged itself against the end platform of an adjoining second-class car filled with pilgrims, where it was found at dawn by an unastonished guard.

Poverty compels the railway administration to operate only a limited service for goods and passengers. Trains run between Baghdad and Shargat twice a week. When the Basra line was opened a daily 22-hour train ran in each direction. It did not pay. At present there are only three such "express" trains a week, and four goods trains, with a few passenger carriages attached, which linger 36 hours on the way.

Few permanent station buildings can be found between Baghdad and Basra. At many places the train halts beside a group of tents. Much damage was done during the rising in 1920, and 100 miles of line had to be rebuilt. The Arabs destroyed buildings, tore up the

rails, and dragged them away by camels across the desert, and even obliterated portions of the road-bed.

No more unpleasant journey can be imagined than that from Basra to the capital. Sand drifts in steadily through every crevice in the carriages and lies thick on the perspiring travellers and their bedding. Food is served during short halts in the desert. The refreshment-room is usually a tent equipped by a native contractor. A breakfast-car serves the "express" trains, but it does not pay to run a through restaurant service en route.

A new passenger train for the main line is now being assembled at the Shaiba shops near Basra. It is reported to be a collection of the most sumptuous saloons ever seen east of Suez, but I am inclined to think this an exaggeration. Any ordinary carriage of the Indian pattern (which is used in Mesopotamia) would seem luxurious to the travellers who are accustomed to the ramshackle equipment now in use.

The cry from home against waste in Mesopotamia has reached the railway administration, and it appears to be trying valiantly to reduce the working expenditure to the lowest possible figure. The staff has been compressed, and the number of workmen so reduced that at present there is no labour for capital expenditure.

"We have had a difficult time," said one railway official, "and I do not see how we can further curtail the cost of upkeep. We were told last year that we should get £500,000 for capital works, but this was reduced to £350,000, of which £100,000 was kept in England.

"Fuel is one of the most expensive items. One-tenth of our total expenditure is for oil, which costs more in this oil-producing country than in Bombay. We burn oil because there is no coal in Mesopotamia, and the cost of importing it is prohibitive.

"We hope to pay our way by the end of the financial year, but much depends on the market price of grain. Already 25,000 tons of this year's crop has been handled.

"This year's revenue was originally estimated at about £1,000,000, but this figure has been reduced by the 'slump' in trade and the flooding of Iraq with war stores. Expenditure is estimated at £720,000. Earnings are down about £13,000 on the first half of the year.

"Three proposals have been made by private interests to take over the railways, but they have come to nothing, as no agreement could be reached as to the present valuation. I estimate the total value of the system at £3,400,000. The railway cantonment at

Baghdad West is valued at £95,000. Land for workshops cost £160,000."

The original cantonment scheme for Baghdad West—a part of the "Greater Baghdad" dream—would have committed the British taxpayer to millions of pounds' expenditure for a kind of garden city in the desert inhabited by railway officials and employees. The original area was greatly reduced. Even as it stands, the cantonment does not escape criticism.

Rows of private residences have sprung up in the plain surrounded by gardens and flowers, and I have heard members of the British commercial community question the wisdom of devoting so much public money to this settlement.

Railway competition with the river transport companies is considered unbusinesslike, since the same rates are charged for haulage from Basra as for conveyance by boat. Goods shipped by rail reach Baghdad in two or three days, as against possibly ten days by water, but I am told that the railway cannot show a profit in view of the enormously increased cost of transport.

It must be remembered that the Tigris steamboat lines—which are operated by British capital—do not welcome the railway as a competitor, and would be glad to see the present system wiped out, since they are suffering from the competition.

Meanwhile, the Iraq Government stands aloof from speculation in railway management. The present unsatisfactory situation can best be ended by the transfer of the system to a private company. Arab control would undoubtedly mean the steady disintegration of the service. The heads of the present administration are experienced railway officials from India. If they were given a free hand by the Mesopotamians, and sufficient capital to put the main line on a paying commercial basis, the country would eventually benefit.

The present situation means that the British taxpayer must put his hand in his pocket every year to maintain communications for which King Feisal's subjects should be responsible. I am told that the home Government has disclaimed all responsibility for loss after April 1 this year. Someone must make it good. It is certain that the Iraq Government cannot.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ARMY "WITH EVERYTHING EXCEPT SOLDIERS."

Two armies and two general staffs have their headquarters in Baghdad. They are distinct organisations, dedicated to the defence and improvement of the desert called Mesopotamia.

The British Army is at one end of Baghdad and the Arab army at the other. Yet it might be figuratively said that the distance between them is greater than the length of Mesopotamia. They have, however, certain aims in common, one of them the acquisition of more public money for military purposes.

The British Army (which is now under the Royal Air Force) has its home near the South Gate. Its leading lights are clustered in the old Residency. Around it are the homes of the staff officers and some of the British civil officials—the finest Arab residences in Baghdad being among them. Other native houses in side streets are now officers' messes and billets. We paid about £55,000 last year as rental for these buildings, the rents being based on the assessment of the Baghdad municipality.

Five miles beyond the British General Headquarters is Hinaidi, with its barracks for 6,000 men.

The Arab army is at the north end of Baghdad. Its general headquarters have offices rather less sumptuous than those of the British force. Outside the North Gate are the old, ramshackle barracks, once tenanted by the Turkish garrison, now occupied by about half the Arab army. This consists of a battalion of infantry and a pack battery.

Remaining fragments are to be found at Hilla (an infantry battalion) and at Mosul (two cavalry regiments and some artillery).

Altogether the Arab army consists of about 3,800 men—for which 400 officers are available—and the cost on paper this year is £600,000. Ja'far Pasha, Minister for War, wants still more money.

There is yet another Arab force, known as the levies, which is maintained by the British taxpayer as an adjunct to the regular military

units. It is about the same size as the Arab army. Its cost on paper this year is £600,000. Like the Arab army, its expenditure will probably be greater.

The levies are mostly Assyrians, not Arabs, and they are looking forward to the end of their service next spring. Very few will re-enlist.

Thus a total of £1,200,000 at the very least is being wasted this year on two nondescript native military organisations which represent less than a British division in strength and which are far less efficient in every way.

There is a watertight compartment between the levies and the Arab troops. The latter are known as "Feisal's Janissaries," and although 23 British officers are attached to them as advisers none of them has the right to give an order direct to the men. It must be transmitted by one of their own officers. Arabic is the language of command. The levies, on the other hand, are commanded in English.

Both native forces emphasise the gulf between them. The Arab army calls itself "Feisal's men" when in contact with the levies, and the levies retort that they are "George's men."

The Iraq army has a top-heavy general staff which shows itself in the streets of Baghdad in khaki and heavy helmets draped with gold cord and tunics covered with ribbons. In fact, the army seems to have every essential except soldiers.

A military college was established 18 months ago as part of the ready-made Government conferred on Mesopotamia. It cost about £42,000 last year. The 400 officers in Iraq have all passed through the six months course of training in British military methods and discipline to fit them for their new posts. Now the college is empty. Yet the Iraq War Office is asking for £30,000 more this year for its maintenance.

Even the harassed Minister of Finance, Saisun Effendi, admitted to me that he thought this demand excessive. In his opinion the school should be closed for three or four years until the present over-supply of officers has been absorbed into a greater Iraq force, and then reopened for classes of cadets. The Iraq War Office—perhaps inspired by the example of other military authorities—not only wants £30,000 for the school but also insists that £600,000 is not sufficient to run the army during the present year.

Picture this official-ridden city of Baghdad:

The British Army—air and terrestrial—sits at one end, pouring

out millions a year for military expenditure. The Iraq army, which is told to be as nearly like us as it can, sits at the other end, reaching as determinedly into an empty Treasury.

Midway between them are lodged the Iraq Ministers, who are intent on the administration of the country. Across the Tigris sits an aggregation of British Ministers intent on the administration of the country. A King shows his Royal standard on one bank, and a High Commissioner flies the Union Jack on the other.

The greatest farce of all, at the present time, is the Arab army.

Ja'far Pasha, the Minister for War, told me quite frankly that an adequate military force could never be raised save by conscription. He wants power to enlist 6,000 men yearly for two years' service. Trained service battalions are vital to the safety of the Government, for the entire country is armed. If we were not here, a concerted movement of tribes against Baghdad would send King Feisal's administration toppling like a house of cards.

The Arab levies are more efficient. Some months ago they were very poor stuff, but hard-working British officers have pulled them into shape, and in the recent operations in the north they did very well. But if two-thirds of this force disappear into civilian life next April, as seems likely, the continuance of the levies will be a difficult problem.

Even King Feisal's advisers regard the Arab army as a doubtful experiment. The present Headquarters staff is far too large. It has been suggested that the country would be far better served by scrapping the entire organisation and building up a gendarmerie trained as a striking force.

Plenty of good material is available. Mesopotamia is full of ex-soldiers who could be welded into smart and serviceable units. But you will have to catch them first.

CHAPTER TEN

THE PALACE THAT FELL INTO THE RIVER

King Feisal wants British money but not British troops.

The taxpayer at home who has been saddled with the useless burden of Mesopotamia will be glad to hear that the King is confident of holding the new State of Iraq with an Arab army in a few months' time, aided only by a few aeroplanes.

His Majesty s optimism is not shared by military experts, least of all by the enthusiastic Air Force which is building an enormous base near Baghdad with an eye to occupying Mesopotamia (at British expense) for at least another 20 years. Nevertheless, King Feisal's view is interesting, inasmuch as it reflects the renewed hopes of the Arab Government, following the acceptance of the treaty with Great Britain.

" With 12,000 Arab troops I am prepared to maintain order and collect the revenues of Iraq," the King said to me during a conversation at the palace.

" True, the Arab army consists at present of only about 4,000 men. Recruits have not been enrolled in sufficient numbers because of the general unrest which prevailed during negotiations with Britain regarding the new treaty. Now, however, I am convinced that we shall be able to bring the army up to the required strength. Within a few months it will be possible for Great Britain to withdraw her military forces from Iraq. Leave us, say, 20 aeroplanes for a time.

" It must be admitted that the people generally have regarded Great Britain with suspicion, but the signing of the treaty has largely allayed the fear that she means to make Iraq a British Colony. Confidence will be fully established by the tactful attitude of our British advisers.

" The country hopes that they will act strictly as advisers, and not try to enforce their views on the Iraq Government. They might well be guided by the example of the British officers attached to the

Arab army. The relations between these advisers and my officers could not be more cordial. The British officers are doing their utmost to benefit us by their wide experience, but they do not attempt to exercise direct control over the troops. Consequently there is no friction, and the army is eager to learn all it can.

"The deficit in this year's revenue is due to the effect of political agitation in the provinces. Now that the tension has been removed, we expect to collect the arrears of taxes without trouble.

"But we need financial assistance from Great Britain. We want British capitalists to invest money in Iraq. We need a loan for essential public works. We are prepared to run the country and to safeguard foreign investors. The withdrawal of the British forces will further allay hostility to Britain and cement the friendly relations between the two countries. If we are to be an independent nation, surely there can be no necessity for an army of occupation."

King Feisal's estimate of national unity is considered somewhat over-confident. I am told that many sheikhs have flocked into Baghdad to see him, and that he enjoys a fair measure of popularity throughout the country. Nevertheless, the general feeling seems to be one of indifference, if not actual hostility. The Mesopotamians cannot forget that he is not one of themselves.

When the King drives through Baghdad he is not saluted with marked enthusiasm. His motor-car, with its impressive escort of Arab cavalry, attracts very little notice. Some of these journeys have been made in depressing silence, and the denizens of the bazaars have eyed the royal procession with cool indifference.

Baghdad is profoundly moved by portents. Opponents of the King have seen sinister warnings in certain recent events. His Majesty's illness evoked significant comments in the bazaars. The collapse of one wing of the old Serai, the ramshackle, barrack-like building formerly the seat of Turkish government and now of the Iraq Ministries, reacted on the superstitious Arabs like a cold douche.

The Serai was a square, two-storey structure built around a colonnaded courtyard, with one side flush with the river bank. Ominous cracks appeared in the river wing about six weeks ago. British engineers promptly ordered the evacuation of the inmates. Two Ministers shifted their documents hurriedly.

The old Court apartments were situated in this block. There

was just time to salve King Feisal's throne, but not the canopy. Both banks of the Tigris were crowded with spectators when the Serai finally fell apart. It was a leisurely business, with plenty of time for the Baghdadis to mobilise on balconies and in boats. They watched the spectacle with cynical amusement.

Crash! The outer wall half collapsed and left a great gap in the building. Cries of enjoyment from the audience. . . .

Crash! The roof fell in and a cloud of dust hid the ruins. The Tigris was dotted with bits of wreckage. . . .

Crash! The Divan, or royal audience chamber, slid piecemeal down the bank and splashed into the muddy stream. The canopy floated placidly to the Maude bridge, watched with grim interest by the Arab spectators.

It seemed to typify the fall of the Iraq Government.

All the evil omens that preceded the dismemberment of the Serai were discussed in the native cafés that night. The summary of them passed from mouth to mouth in the following words:

"What a foolish man is this, thus to ignore the warnings of God!

"He stays on.

"His Ministers desert him. Yet he stays on.

"His body is mutilated by infidels and he suffers pain at the hands of the British doctors. Yet he stays on.

"God orders that his Divan be pulled down; his throne is flung into the river. Yet he stays on!

"Who is he to resist the will of God?"

The King is housed far more modestly than the High Commissioner and General Headquarters. His palace on the river bank two miles beyond the North Gate of Baghdad will not bear comparison with the two British Residencies further down the Tigris.

The house was formerly a British hospital. It is of brick, two storeys high, long and narrow, and stands so close to the river bank that there is scarcely room for a motor-car to turn at the sentry-boxes. There are no gates or walls, and the approach is through a sandy waste dotted with rank weeds. Rusting machinery is strewn about. Near the house is a mud-walled garage. A by-road, a quarter of a mile long, leads from the palace to the main avenue which enters Baghdad at the North Gate. This avenue is brilliantly lighted with electric lamps, and the glare is resented by the natives living along the way.

A new Divan is being built for King Feisal a short distance from his residence. Meanwhile, he holds his Court in a low brick building just off the main road, which was formerly the British military dairy. This dairy was one of the comfortable adjuncts to the Headquarters organisation; it cost thousands of pounds to build and equip, and the Iraq Government found it too expensive to take over as a going concern. So the dairy has become the throne-room.

The new Divan is being built by the Iraq Government from designs by Major Wilson, adviser to the Public Works Department, and will cost under £7,000. It is half an octagon, one storey high, ornamented by a row of pillars of Mosul marble which cost £8 each, delivered in Baghdad. The accommodation includes an audience chamber, the Divan, a dining-room, a small drawing-room, two rooms for the King's private use, and two for aides-de-camp. The Wakf (i.e., department in charge of religious foundations) is paying the bill.

One cannot help contrasting the humble home of King Feisal with the two costly buildings put up by the British Government in Baghdad. He is the head of the State, yet his residence is less commodious and imposing than some of the Arab mansions now occupied by British officials. It is, perhaps, too much to suggest that his unpretentious palace might have been good enough for a headquarters for the High Commissioner.

We have made King Feisal the ruler of Iraq and he is hidden in the suburbs. Apparently there is no other place for him. Room must be made for the High Commissioner's Cabinet and the busy staff at General Headquarters. If you erect three elaborate sets of machinery for the purposes of Government, in an already congested city, someone must be crowded out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"GLARING EXAMPLES OF WASTE"

A careful investigation of British expenditure in Mesopotamia will reveal some glaring examples of waste by certain departments due to their determination to avoid being charged for work done on behalf of the British taxpayer.

That unfortunate individual is forced to pay twice over in consequence.

One case of this kind is the double charge for transport made during the carrying out of certain military improvements near Baghdad last year. The Army transport available consisted of wagons and mules—each wagon drawn by two mules—for which the charge was £1 10s. a day. Civilian transport of the same kind cost 10s. a day.

If the Army engineers used the Army, wagons their accounts showed an expenditure of £1 10s. per day per wagon. If they used commercial transport, their expenditure was only 10s. per day per wagon. But the Army transport was still charged to the British taxpayer at £1 10s. per wagon per day, whether it was used or not, the only difference being that the expenditure was entered against the transport vote.

Thus the Army engineers showed a saving of £1 per day per wagon on transport, but the British taxpayer paid £2 per day in order that this false showing of economy might appear in the accounts of one department. The Army transport had to be paid for in any case, and it remained idle while civilian labour was employed at additional expense.

The view of the Army was wholly cynical.

"We made the Army transport idle when it might have been used," said a Baghdad official, "because the Royal Engineers did not want to be debited with £1 10s. a day per wagon. The system was stopped early this year, and the present arrangement with the Royal Air Force is much more satisfactory. They only charge for transport for what is actually done, and at the commercial rate."

The system of costing employed by Army accountants is blamed for this double charge.

* * *

Whatever the Government may say to the contrary, rule by

bomb in Mesopotamia has as one of its underlying motives the collection of taxes from turbulent Arabs.

Responsibility rests with the Baghdad Government, not with the Royal Air Force. King Feisal's Administration cannot live without money. Whenever a provincial Governor (backed by his British adviser) is unable to extract the revenue from the people, he threatens them with force. The only local force available is the police. They cannot deal with armed tribesmen who are only too ready to murder any interloper in their private affairs.

Thereupon the Governor writes into Baghdad for assistance in "restoring order." It is probably true that the inhabitants are in a dangerous condition of unrest. The request for money on behalf of a far-off Government and an imported king is likely to produce that state of mind. Practically all the male population is armed. So the bombing planes go out from Hinaidi cantonment with their 30 lb. missiles, and the district is scourged from the air.

Obviously the aeroplanes are used for other disciplinary measures, but a persistent refusal to pay taxes is a sign of rebellion which the hungry ministry in the Baghdad Serai is only too ready to interpret as the prelude to a rising. Bombing has frequently quieted areas which were undoubtedly on the verge of open revolt, and it cannot be denied that at the same time the payment of taxes has been stimulated thereby.

The bombers quartered at Hinaidi are merely the policemen of the air, and they must carry out the instructions received from the civil power. When Turkey ruled Mesopotamia she employed methods even more ruthless in imposing her authority on the country, and in harvesting the land revenue and other overdue taxes.

It happens sometimes that even the local Arab authorities concur in the non-payment of taxes. I was told while in Baghdad of the Mutasserif (Governor) of Hilla (the district which contains the ruins of Babylon) who solved the problem of taxation by making the pro-British Arabs pay double, and letting the anti-British Arabs off.

The Arabs have accepted bombing as part of the established order of things. Sheikhs who come to Baghdad to talk about their local affairs frequently receive warning that opposition to the orders of the Government will result in their villages being visited by the air police. A British official related to me the incident of one such chief who stubbornly refused to obey a certain regulation affecting his area.

"Of course, I know," he said, "that if I refuse you will bomb me. All right. I have been bombed before."

The moral effect is in many cases strong, but I am told that the Mesopotamians generally fear bombs much less than they did two years ago. Sheikhs have complained that this method of warfare is unfair, since their wives and families suffer unduly, and one of them, after having his house and livestock destroyed, wrote a protest in flaming Arabic challenging the "British invaders" to "come down from the sky and fight them like men."

A British official who is fully conversant with the routine of "government by bomb" said to me:

"I think it may surprise people at home to know how generally we have been bombing these people. Mind you, I don't say it is not necessary. There is no other way of making them do as they are told. At the same time bombing is becoming almost as common as patrolling a disorderly area with military police. On October 14 there were seven distinct bombing attacks in various districts. Hardly a day has passed without the aeroplanes going to some disaffected district and dropping explosives."

In view of the Turkish demand at Lausanne for the return of Mosul, it is interesting to note that expert military opinions in Mesopotamia agree as to the necessity for holding all the country or evacuating it down to the Basra area. The return of Mosul province to the Turks would make the continued existence of King Feisal's kingdom impossible.

The figures recently given in the House of Commons as to the cost of the new British Residency at Baghdad are curiously at variance with those I received from authoritative sources while there. The cost of the site is now said to be £60,000, but I was informed by one of the officials concerned in the purchase that it was roughly £45,000. By adding £15,000 to the cost of the site and existing buildings, and at the same time preserving the general total—about £165,000—it would appear from the statement in the House of Commons that less was spent in remodelling and adding to the Residency buildings.

The figures supplied to me in Baghdad show that the total amount spent on the new Residency (exclusive of the purchase money) up to the middle of this year was £120,600, of which amount the Arab Government paid £8,400 in 1921. The army paid two sums of £59,700 and £52,200. Thus the total cost, with the purchase price of £60,000 as given in the House of Commons, is more than £180,000. And the estimates for this year include the sum of £23,000 for "repairs and maintenance of Residency, including new outbuildings," of which £5,000 is to be spent.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WITHDRAW TO BASRA

If we cut our losses in Mesopotamia and withdraw to the Basra area, our hold on the Persian Gulf will be secure. The British taxpayer will not have to sink more millions in the effort to prop up an unstable and unsympathetic native Government.

Basra division is the only self-supporting portion of Iraq. The people pay taxes willingly. They like us. They have a profitable export trade and are financially able to provide for their own defence. One expert, who has long been resident here, assures me that they could even support a brigade of British troops.

The division is about 115 miles long, from the mouth of the Shatt-ul-Arab River to a point 50 miles north of Basra city, on the Tigris, and 10 miles north of the reputed Garden of Eden, on the Euphrates. It embraces the fertile area nearly to Amarah. An additional 40 miles would bring in the delta of the Tigris as far as that important centre, and give us the best part of Mesopotamia.

All the "date wealth" of Mesopotamia lies along the Shatt-ul-Arab between Basra and the Gulf, a distance of 70 miles, and the yearly exports are valued at more than £1,000,000. Trade routes from Persia reach the Gulf on the northern bank. The pipe-lines of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company end at Abadan, on the Persian bank of the Shatt-ul-Arab, 25 miles from its mouth. If we keep Basra, ample protection is given the great depot and refineries at Abadan, which is the present headquarters for the oil supply from the Persian Gulf.

Basra division has 300,000 inhabitants. Politically they may be divided into three classes. The majority of the landowners and all the wealthy men would be glad to see us take charge here. The middle-class Arab is prone to be pro-Turk because fat jobs were forthcoming for this stratum of the population in pre-war days. Much of the Turkish propaganda here, as elsewhere in Mesopotamia, can be traced to ex-Turkish officials who would be assured of positions if the Turk came back.

The lower classes do not care whether Basra division is ruled by Briton, Arab, or Turk as long as they are not interfered with unduly by the Government in power.

Basra division has more independence than other parts of the Iraq kingdom. The real head of civil affairs is Major Wilson, of the Indian Army, whose title is adviser to the Mutasserif (local governor). The latter is a public-spirited landowner who accepted the post solely to assist us in developing the district. He and his adviser have offices side by side in the old Turkish Serai (Government House), and between them they administer the division without a hitch.

Major Wilson deals direct with the local military authorities (Group Headquarters, Royal Air Force) on all routine matters without first going through the Baghdad Government.

Revenue comes in without pressure from aeroplanes or otherwise. Less than £35 is outstanding in taxes for the period 1914–22, and this amount is secured by bonds instead of bombs. There are no native levies. Order is maintained by municipal and provincial police under a British commandant, who will be superseded when a competent native is found.

Basra city and the adjoining town of Ashar have a combined population of 55,000, including a large percentage of naturalised Persians. There is very little political unrest—far less than up country—and little crime. Even a stranger can detect the difference between the atmosphere of this riverside port and that of Baghdad with its duplication of Governments, its quarrels and intrigues, and its internal friction.

Trade has suffered here as elsewhere through decrease in imports and tightness of money. Some firms have gone out of business since the boom collapsed; others are carrying on with caution. No one, however, is deeply pessimistic. Outside capital will be forthcoming to help develop this end of Mesopotamia when investors have sufficient confidence in the policy of the British Government. Everyone is waiting for the end of the present unsatisfactory régime.

Basra possesses one advantage over Baghdad. It has one good road which survives the periodic rainfall. This thoroughfare, which skirts the main creek, is metalled—a rare thing in a country without stone—and is the only souvenir of military expenditure which has not been condemned at some time or other as sheer waste. Without Strand-road Basra would flounder helplessly in the mud.

Other military "improvements" that cost the British taxpayer dear are numbered among the peace-time assets of Basra. Margil

wharves, which represent an outlay of about £1,250,000, have achieved unenviable notoriety through repeated attacks on their usefulness. They were built four miles above Basra, when Margill was a vast military camp. The city of tents and huts has vanished, and the wharves are left isolated between the river and the desert.

The military mind could not, or would not, see beyond the armistice. A permanent port was constructed solely with a view to serving the army, yet it was constructed to last for generations. Suggestions that it was in the wrong place for a commercial port were ignored or scorned. One business man who pointed out the unsuitability of wharves four miles up stream was told bluntly that he was wasting his breath.

" You don't seem to realise," said an officer, " that we are not here to think of you civilians. The site suits the army ; that is sufficient."

The wharves are built of teak, imported especially from Burma. They are 3,000 ft. long, and are fitted with the latest travelling cranes. Six large steamships can unload at once. The railway has been brought alongside, from the main terminus at Makinah, and goods for up country can be transferred direct. Galvanised iron sheds for warehousing freight were added by the port directorate when it took the wharves over from the army.

They are excellent wharves, but in the wrong place. Goods intended for Basra firms must be unloaded there, warehoused, then re-loaded in lighters and brought down the river again to the water-front where the principal importing companies have their head-quarters. Before the war, all steamers were discharged in mid-stream there. The present cumbrous and unbusinesslike method fills the dependent firms with fury. Some of them urge the " scrapping " of the new port.

On the land side, Margill wharves can be reached only by an equally notorious military road which cost at least £500,000. The base camp became a slough during the rains, and it was imperative that the army should have an unhampered line of communication for men and supplies. Stone was brought from Kais Island, 70 miles down the Persian Gulf, and the result was a metalled thoroughfare, zigzagging across the tented plain, to which was given the name of Lake-road.

To-day it traverses a desert disfigured by ruined huts and the residue of a vanished camp. The desolation of Babylon is not more complete. To reach the remote port of Basra from the city, you must motor for miles over this level boulevard from the city itself.

I am told that Margill wharves could have been built by competent civil engineers for about half the amount the army spent on them. Money was no object then. The outcry which followed the so-called " Mesopotamia scandal " [the treatment of the British wounded early in the war] inspired extravagance right and left. It extended to administrative as well as to constructive work.

The port directorate which manages Margill is condemned as an over-expensive organisation, but it effected a drastic reduction in the cost of management when the port was taken over from the military authorities in April, 1920. One of the officials tells me that in the first year of directorate control the expenditure was about one-tenth of what it was in the previous year. The number of employees was reduced from 7,000 to 1,200, yet the same volume of business was handled. It was at times even greater, for the directorate had to look after munitions and stores required during the rising in 1920, in addition to the commercial traffic.

For the first year of civil administration the budget was about £374,000 ; for this year it is only £133,000.

Still, as a sound business concern the port directorate does not receive universal endorsement. It is self-supporting at the moment, but only because of excessively high port dues. Tonnage has fallen from an average of 38,000 tons in 1920 to under 15,000 tons at the present time, and on this basis the port cannot possibly pay.

The directorate, too, is criticised as being over-staffed. There are 21 British officials drawing salaries, whereas the Bombay port directorate, which handles on an average 150,000 tons of cargo a month, has only 9 British officials. The head of the directorate receives £2,000 a year, and has in addition a residence, a motor-car, and two fast launches, each with a crew of four men ; and some critics of the administration maintain that his total cost, on this basis, cannot be less than £4,500 a year. In addition, there is an assistant director who receives £1,200 a year.

It might be supposed that the port offices would find a home within easy access of the business community. Not so. They occupy a large ex-hospital on the other side of the river. Shippers having business with the authorities waste much time between the wharves four miles away and the headquarters on the opposite bank. In fact, the arrangement could not be more unsatisfactory.

It seems unlikely that the British taxpayer will recover any appreciable portion of the cost of Margill wharves from Iraq. Even the present high port dues, which simply help to keep down import

trade, do not yield the net revenue on which repayment depends. No recital of the waste of money at Basra is complete without reference to the new automatic telephone system, probably the most expensive ever installed.

When it was ordered, the Army operated between 300 and 400 telephones in the town, and had applications for 600 more. Nothing was too good for Mesopotamia, whatever the cost, so the very latest automatic exchange, having a capacity of 1,000 telephones, was ordered from England. The price was £60,000.

Owing to various delays, the equipment was not shipped until early this year. By that time trade depression had so far reduced the number of telephone users that the £60,000 order was clearly a waste of money. It could not be cancelled, however, as automatic installations are measured to fit one town and no other, and the cables are cut in accordance with the length of the streets traversed.

To-day there are only 308 users of the automatic system. It works splendidly. It should—at a cost of just under £195 per instrument.

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